



Mediation In Early Intervention

Information for Families

Mediation is a confidential, non-adversarial process of resolving conflicts. In early intervention, mediation can assist families of young children with developmental delays and disabilities, early intervention programs, and agencies in resolving disagreements regarding early intervention services for an infant or toddler.

A trained mediator helps the parties reach a mutually satisfactory solution that is in the best interest of the family.

Mediation is voluntary, optional for both parties and completely confidential.

What is Early Intervention Mediation?

Early intervention mediation is a way of resolving disagreements between families and early intervention personnel about early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Mediation is an optional alternative to a due process hearing, is less costly and less adversarial.

Early intervention mediation can:

- resolve disagreements concerning identification, evaluation, or early intervention services for infants and toddlers
- clarify issues causing the disagreement.
- provide those involved with uninterrupted opportunities to present their point of view
- stimulate mutual problem-solving efforts.
- promote positive working relationships between families and early intervention programs
- help parents and early intervention program personnel focus on what they have in common - the young child - rather than on issues that divide them

How does Mediation Work?

When parents and Early Steps programs are unable to resolve their differences through the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) process, they may request mediation. Both parties have to agree to mediation and sign a request form.

Mediation can occur before or at the same time that a request for a due process hearing is made. Mediation does not interfere with the right to a due process hearing or with due process timelines.

After a request for mediation is made, a mediator is assigned. The mediator contacts both parties and sets up a time and place for a mediation session. Generally, the mediation occurs within 21 days after the mediator is assigned. Mediation sessions generally last three to four hours.

Participants in a mediation session are the family and any personnel involved in providing early intervention services. Any party with knowledge necessary to resolving the dispute may participate in mediation.

Do Parents Have to Pay for Mediation?

In Florida, early intervention mediation is free to parents. Children's Medical Services covers the costs.

When both parties agree to mediation, they send a written request to:

Florida Department of Health
Children's Medical Services
Early Steps State Office
4052 Bald Cypress Way, Bin #A06
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1707
Fax: 850-921-8138

For more information about early intervention mediation, contact the Children's Medical Services, Early Steps State Office; telephone: 850-245-4200.

From families...

"At mediation, everyone was listening and not ignoring what I said and an agreement was reached quickly."

"Thank you for the opportunity of mediation. We are very satisfied with the outcomes."

"The mediator gave us an opportunity to say what we felt and allowed us to get to the bottom of the problem."

From early intervention program representatives...

"Mediation shows that good faith efforts are attempted by all parties involved. To accommodate the parent, our mediation was held on a Saturday. I believe early intervention programs and providers must make whatever arrangements they can to attempt to resolve differences."

"The opportunity for creative problem-solving was taken advantage of by both parties here, and I think the skills of the mediator are largely responsible."

From mediators...

"Although we did not reach total agreement, there were positive outcomes. The parent and the program did improve their communication and make progress in understanding each other's position."

"I feel the process really works, even when both sides are committed to their position. You need to be persistent and believe that there is a solution for both sides."

